10: d'Orleans--365 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 487

"Having decided to leave Luang Prabang for Bangkok, I have the choice of four principal routes; through Xieng Mai and Raheng down the Meping; through Nan going directly overland from Luang Prabang to the Menam; through Paklay, spending some days in descending the Mekong, and going on then to strike the Menam at Pitchai or Ontaradit; and finally by Nong Kay on the Mekong and thence to Korat. Our state of health and also the lateness of the season leads us to adopt the shortest of these, via Paklay, which has, moreover, to my eyes, this advantage, that it is one of the most frequented of the trade routes, and will give me some idea of the navigation of the Mekong."

68: Mouhot--119-120 N-5 (1858-61) 1864 Laotians
116, 122, 175, 487

"To consult any existing maps of Indo-China for my guidance in the interior of Laos [HD: i.e. territory which is now central and northeastern Siam] would have been a folly, no traveller, at least to my knowledge, having penetrated into east Laos, or published any authentic information respecting it. To question the natives about places more than a degree distant would have been useless. My desire was to reach Louang-Prabang by land, to visit the northern tribes dependent on that state, and then again to descend the Mekong to Cambodia. Setting out from Korat, [HD: in Siam, northeast of Bangkok] I had but to proceed northwards as long as I found practicable roads and inhabited places; and if I could not go by a direct route to Louang-Prabang, I [120] should only have to diverge to the east when I judged it necessary."

115: Le Boulanger--199 H-4 (no date) 1931 AM1 Indochina
(20th Cent.) Laotians AM8

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Fig. 18. Bridge over the Nam-Khane at Luang-Prabang.

/Facing p. 326/

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its southward course, and just before it reaches the 20th parallel it is joined by its first important left-bank tributary, the Nam-Tha.

The Nam-Tha comes from the northeast and crosses the rich plain of Muong-Luong-Nam-Tha which has been called "the jewel of all Upper Laos," for it is an extremely fertile and well watered region capable of being made into an infinite number of fine rice-fields. The Nam-Tha is navigable in all seasons as far as Sop-Ngim, and as far as Muong-Luong for small pirogues.

The Mékong continues in a sourtherly direction as far as Ban Pak-Kop (19° 45'), then suddenly bends eastward for a distance of 200 or so kilometers as far as Luang-Prabang, as if it were going to flow into the Gulf of Tonkin. In this part of its course it flows between steep hills. It can be navigated by pirogues in all seasons despite the Keng-Li rapids, which require merchandise to be unloaded during the low water period. Upstream from Luang-Prabang it resumes its north and south direction, and towards the 20th parallel its left bank is joined by three large rivers, the Nam-Hou, the Nam-Suong and the Nam-Khan.

In view of the length of its courses and the volume of its waters, the Nam-Hou may be regarded, as we have noted, as one of the branches of the Mékong. Although its mouth is narrow, it soon widens out and takes on the appearance of a great river as far as Muong-Ngoï. At this point it becomes narrow again, only to widen once more until its junction with the Nam-Ngoua. The Nam-Hou could doubtless be negotiated by steam launches during the high water period as far as Muong-Koua (about 150 kilometers from Luang-Prabang), the market where the produce of the region is concentrated. It is navigable in all seasons for pirogues as far as Muong-Houa. From Muong-Houa to Muong-Hahin and Muong-Hou the Nam-Hou can be negotiated only by extremely narrow rafts going downstream. The great rapids of Keng-Louang, situated a day's journey from Pak-Hou, require the cargoes of pirogues to be completely unloaded during middle and low water periods.

[81] By way of the Nam-Ngoua, its left-bank tributary, and its sub-tributary the Nam-Youn, which are navigable in all seasons for small pirogues, the high plateau of Muong-Theng (Dien-Bien-Phu, province of Van-Bu, Tonkin) can be reached. From that point two land routes connect with the Black River at Muong-Lai (Lai-Chau) and Van-Bu.

[487]

487 A particularity which should be noted is that these two land routes which represent some hundred odd kilometers are the only ones which the traveler can take in order to go from Hanoi to Saigon by way of Luang- [Illustration here] Prabang, that is to say by way of the Red River, the Black River, the tributaries of the Mékong and the great river itself, or in order to cover a total distance of approximately 3200 kilometers. These hundred kilometers of land roads are the only ones which merit the name, since all the rest of the journey is made on navigable waterways in steamships, pirogues and rafts.

505 133 The Nam-Suong and its tributary the Nam-Seng can be negotiated in all seasons by pirogues and rafts. Ban-Pak-Seng, at the junction of the Nam-Suong and the Nam-Seng, is the capital of one of the most prosperous cantons in the province of Luang-Prabang.

A day's journey away from Luang-Prabang the Nam-Suong is blocked by [82] a shelf called the Keng-Luang which necessitates complete portage of merchandise and even of pirogues and rafts at certain seasons.

The Nam-Khan is navigable for pirogues and rafts during the greater part of the year, starting at Muong-You which is the ford for the road from Tran-Ninh to Luang-Prabang. It flows into the Mékong in the northern part of this city, one of the suburbs of which it circles.

[361] Luang-Prabang, the capital of the kingdom of the same name, is situated at an altitude of 350 meters above sea level, at 19° 54' 20" N. latitude and 99° 45' E. longitude. From the commercial point of view it is one of the most important centers--if not the most important--in Laos. The city numbers about 10,000 inhabitants and 2000 houses. In Luang-Prabang the river is 350 to 400 meters wide. Just above and below the city it is blocked by sandbanks which leave a channel only 100 meters wide during the low water period, but which is always navigable for pirogues and rafts.

The following table shows the average length of time it takes to travel both up and down the rivers between Luang-Prabang and the posts on this reach.

389 the rockets are naturally in proportion to the size of the latter. For large rockets, they are made up of a kind of broad, triangular ladder, the top of which is leaned against a tree top.

524 527 Hot air balloons. In northern Laos, balloons are constructed out of paper which is either made locally or imported from China. They are cylindro-spherical in shape and a little gondola of rattan cane is suspended from them by a cotton thread. In the gondola there is an oil cup filled with lard and provided with two or three cotton wicks, and these are lit in order to keep the air in the balloons hot for a given length of time.

Since they are generally launched in the evening at the time of the great holiday of the twelfth month (October-November), the absence of wind makes it possible to follow their aerial course as long as the cotton wicks continue to give off light.

[469] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER X

1. PRESENT ROUTES OF COMMUNICATION BY LAND

487 We have already dealt in Chapter II with the routes of communication by river, and so shall deal here only with land routes (1).

(1) See Appendix XXVII.

In Laos they are of three kinds:

1. The cart roads negotiable by ox-carts and wagons;

2. The mule tracks over which elephants, horses, mules and oxen can pass.

3. The paths or even mere trails which can be used only by travelers on foot.

[481] [470] As a consequence of the ingrained habit which both animals and people have of always walking in single file, the roads of Laos, like those of many other lands, are reduced to the width of a path which is marked on the ground either by the trampling animals and men, or by two deep ruts into which the wheels of carts sink. In the forest, depending on how wide and how high a path has been cleared through the undergrowth, a road may be practicable for elephants, men on horseback, oxen or only for travelers on foot.

491 In a land where the population is so sparse and where the centers are often at great distances from one another, the roads have been laid out in accordance with two principal concerns: the shortest distance and the avoidance of as much maintenance work as possible. Thus in order to fulfill these two conditions, they pass through swamps on the plains and in mountainous regions over the crests, the gentlest slopes and the least steep hillsides.

In principle, these roads are supposed to be repaired every year, refilled, laid out again if necessary, rid of the trees which have fallen across them and, in a word, kept up in an easily passable state. The administration makes every effort to reach this goal, and is gradually trying to modify the routes and make the bridges which are thrown over the ravines and watercourses more solid and permanent. But time is needed to change the age-old habits of the people and to make them follow a master plan of methodically conceived and executed projects.

487 491 175 In the extreme north in the territory of Muong-Hou-Neua, there are mountain mule tracks which continue on into Yunnan. They were once paved by the Chinese using paving stones taken from the surrounding rocks, and then formed very broad, low steps through the mountains. Traces can still be seen of these roads which have today fallen into disrepair, and there remain, particularly at crossings over watercourses, straight or slanting stone bridges which have fallen into ruins. At certain points there are also stone drinking troughs which sometimes bear the remains of sculptures.

487 In sum, there are scarcely any roads except paths in Laos, and the latter are sufficient for communication by land. Moreover, wide roads have been experimented with in various provinces [471] over sections of varying length. On these wide roads, often even paved, which were built with high crowns and provided with gutters along the sides, it was found that the natives and their animals stubbornly continued to trace a tiny, whimsically twisting path outside of which the grass kept on growing until it covered the road once more.

Here, for each province, is a list of the main roads with some indication of the category to which they belong. We shall not deal, to be sure, with the many paths which are frequented only by travelers on foot and are designed to place one village in communication with another.

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Province of Muong-Hou. The trade routes which cross the Muong-Hou are:

1. The road from Luang-Prabang to S'semao by way of Muong-Sai, Muong-Hou-Tai, Muong-Hou-Neua, with branches at Muong-Yo to Muong-La and at Muong-Hou-Tai to Man-La;

2. The road from Luang-Prabang to Dien-Bien-Phu by way of the valley of the Nam-Hou as far as Muong-Houne. This route has been abandoned for the river route along the Nam-Hou and the Nam-Ngoua;

3. The road from Talan to Man-La merely crosses the territory of Kien-Seo in order to return to Yunnan via Muong-Le;

4. The most important road is that which connects the Sib-Song-Pahn-Na with the Black River.

Starting at I-Hou, it passes through Man-La, Muong-Hou-Neua, Pou-Fang, and Muong-Nhie and ends at Lai-Chau.

The trip from I-Hou to Lai-Chau takes twenty days. This route is followed by the caravans of Deo-Van-Tri, the Quan-Dao of Lai-Chau, which transport tea from the Pahn-Na to Tonkin (30 tons in 1897);

5. From I-Hou to Man-Hao (Red River) by way of Yunnan (thirty days).

This road has the advantage of being better built and better kept up. There are stone bridges over the watercourses, and it passes through important centers in Yunnan such as I-Pang, S'semao, Pou-Eurl and Talan.

All of these roads belong to the second category. [472]

Province of Vien-Poukha. 1. From Luang-Prabang to Vien-Poukha by way of Muong-Sai, Sop-Ngim and Muong-Luong-Nam-Tha (16 days).

2. From Vien-Poukha to Xieng-Khong by way of Muong-Mugne (117 kilometers, 5 days);

3. From Vien-Poukha to Muong-Sing (80 kilometers, 3 days);

4. From Muong-Sing to Xieng-Kok (72 kilometers, 3 days).

These roads belong to the second category.

Provinces of Luang-Prabang and Tran-Ninh. In these provinces the main roads of communication are as follows:

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1. From Luang-Prabang to Bangkok by way of Pitchai.

Luang-Prabang to Pak-Lay (Mekong).....	4 days
Pak-Lay to Pitchai (Siam) by land.....	10 "
Pitchai to Bangkok (Menam).....	11 "
Total	25 days.
Length of return voyage.....	50 "
Entire trip, going and return.....	75 days.

2. From Luang-Prabang to Vien-Tiane by way of Muong-Khassy, Som-Di and Tourakome, in 11 to 12 days.

[32] This road belongs to the second category, but only during the dry season. Certain parts are flooded in the plains or impassable in the mountains during the rainy season.

3. From Luang-Prabang to Vinh (Annam) by way of Tran-Ninh.

By land to Tha-Do, going either through Ban-Pak-Sa and Xieng-Det, or through Sop-Vi and Muong-You to reach Xieng-Khouang (Tran-Ninh); from Tha-Do to Vinh via the Song-Mo and the Song-Ca. Length of trip 20 days, and of return trip, that is to say from Vinh to Luang-Prabang, 30 days. A minimum of 50 days for the round trip (1). A second category road.

(1) This route is extremely picturesque, and the Superior Resident describes it as follows:

"For tourists I should recommend all of this route from Luang-Prabang to Xieng-Khouang by way of Muong-You, especially the part between Sop-Tia and Ban-Namat, a part of which our present maps do not give any idea. Between these two points one crosses the Pou-Hong, a very high peak. The road follows the crest almost continually and passes over the highest point. When one reaches the last peaks, the view stretches out in all directions as far as the eye can see and one can then gain some idea of Laos and particularly of the kingdom of Luang-Prabang. Everywhere, on all sides, there is nothing but a chaos of mountains pressed against one another, and the location of the valleys is indicated only by a few bands of mist, especially at the beginning of the rainy season. Above these mountains rise isolated needles of calcareous rock which have extremely bizarre shapes.

"On the plateau from Ban-Sot to Xieng-Khouang, one would really think that one was on one of the plateaus of the Juras or of

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Switzerland. Everywhere pine forests cover the summits of small, low and very gently sloping hills, covered with a carpet of verdure which rests the eyes pleasantly." (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, 1900, loc. cit.) [Translator's note. Probably refers to December 1900, "Rapport du Résident supérieur sur le Tran-Ninh."]

[473] On the territory of Tran-Ninh, a road is now being put into a suitable state of repair which will avoid Xieng-Khouang and lead directly from the frontier of Luang-Prabang to that of Annam. This road, which will be able to be made into a cart road, will shorten the trip by two days.

During the high water period the length of the trip from Muong-You to Luang-Prabang can be shortened by four days by going down the Nam-Khan.

4. From Luang-Prabang to Muong-Son (Hua-Pahn).

a. Via the Mekong and the Nam-Hou as far as Muong-Ngoi, and by land from Muong-Ngoi to Muong-Son via Sop-Sat (13 to 15 days).

b. By land, passing through Ban-Sop-Vi and Muong-Sakok (11 days).

This road has a few bad parts which necessitate its classification in the third category.

5. From Luang-Prabang to Hanoi, by way of Lai-Chau.

a. The Mekong, the Nam-Hou and the Nam-Ngoua to Dien-Bien-Phu.

b. From Dien-Bien-Phu to Lai-Chau, by land.

c. From Lai-Chau to Hanoi by way of Van-Bu and Cho-Bo (Black River).

The total trip takes 18 to 30 days, depending on the height of the waters. The land route is in fairly good condition; second category.

6. From Luang-Prabang to Muong-Hou.

Via the Mekong and the Nam-Hou to Muong-Ha, and from Muong-Ha to Muong-Hou by land: 16 to 26 days.

Second category roads.

7. From Luang-Prabang to Muong-Nan (Siam).

[474] a. By land via Pak-Lung and Muong-Hou-Sa (13 days).

b. Via the Mekong to Ban-Tha-Dua, and from Tha-Dua to Nan by land via Nape (9 days).

8. From Pak-Lay to Tahit (Outaradit, Siam) by way of the Pou-Dou (8 to 23 days, depending on the method of transportation

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used).

9. From Pak-Lay to Muong-Pit-Sanoulak (Siam) by way of Ken-Tao and Dane-Sai (10 days).

Second category roads (1).

(1) Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine. "Le royaume de Luang-Prabang, d'après une monographie de M. le Commissaire du Gouvernement Grand."

Province of the Hua-Pahn. From Muong-Son to Muong-Het, by land (5 to 6 days).

From Muong-Son to Xieng-Khouang, by land (14 to 15 days).

Second category roads, but which are not practicable over their whole course during the rainy season, especially from Muong-Son to Xieng-Khouang.

Province of Vien-Tiane. 1. From Vien-Tiane to Tran-Ninh.

a. By way of Muong-Poun.

b. Via the Nam-Sane (Tha-Tom).

2. From Vien-Tiane to Cammon by way of Borikane.

3. Vien-Tiane is connected to Burma by the Muong-Leui, Outaradit and Muong-Pray road, and with Siam by Nong-Khay and Korat.

The road to Burma which, from Muong-Pray, continues towards Xieng-Mai-Moulmein, is attracted towards the one from Luang-Prabang on the left bank of the Mekong, in the village of Pong-Ngeum.

These roads belong to the second category. Some parts which are not yet in good condition are to be improved in the imminent future. The road from Tha-Tom to Xieng-Khouang, in particular, was the object of a large repair project in 1900. It is now negotiable by horseback riders and beasts of burden.

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[475] Province of Cammon. 1. From Pak-Hin-Boun to Vinh (Annam).

From Pak-Hin-Boun to Keng-Kiet (by water).....	3	days
From Keng-Kiet to Cammon.....	2-1/2	"
From Cammon to Ha-Trai via Nape and the ridge of Tram-Mua.....	1-1/2	"
From Ha-Trai to Vinh (by water).....	2	"
Total.....	9	days

This road belongs to the second category, and is traveled by elephants used for transporting goods. It is possible to travel from Pak-Hin-Boun to Keng-Kiet by a rather poor path for travelers on foot.

2. From Lakhone to Vinh by way of Qui-Hop (12-1/2 days, including 10 by land).

This road joins the above at Cho-Pho. It can only be classed in the third category, and is a path for travelers on foot.

3. From Na-Huong to Mahasay (by land, 4 days).

4. From Tha-Khek to Mahasay (by land, 2-1/2 days).

5. From Pak-Hin-Boun to Vien-Tiane and Savannakhet along the Mekong (1).

(1) A road for carts some twenty kilometers long is planned between Pak-Hin-Boun and Ban-Ta-Koua to facilitate the working of tin mines.

These roads, although poor in certain parts, may be classified in the second category.

Province of Song-Khone. 1. From Savannakhet to Ban-Mouang by way of Song-Khone, Ban-Dan-Na-Lao, Kham-Thong-Niai and Pak-Sedone (10 days).

2. From Savannakhet to Quang-Tri (Annam) by way of Song-Khone, Muong-Phine and Ai-Lao (15 to 20 days).

These routes belong to the second category. During the dry season, certain parts of their course may be classified in the first category.

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Province of Ban-Mouang. 1. Road along the Mekong, connecting Ban-Mouang with Khong (4 days).

[476] 2. Road from Bassac to Attopeu. It starts at Fia-Fay on the Mekong, and follows the Attopeu telegraph line (5 days).

3. Road connecting the plateau of the Bolovens with the Sedone. It starts at [Illustration here] Ban-Da-Sia and ends at Champi. This is the road followed by oxen and elephants carrying cardamom.

All these roads are in the second category. The one along the Mekong may even be said to be in the first category during the dry season, at certain points of its route.

Province of Khong. 1. On the island of Khong, two cart roads connect the capital with the southern point and the west coast. Both belong to the first category.

2. Road along the left bank of the Mekong, from Khong to Stung-Treng (3 days). Same remark as for the other roads which follow the bank of the river.

3. Road from Khong to Siempang and Ban-Takalane (Se-Sane): 4 days.

4. Road from Ban-Kok-Padek (left bank of the Mekong, below Moulapoumok on the right bank) to Ban-Takalane, joining the above just before Siempang.

These roads belong in the second category.

[477] Province of Stung-Treng. 1. Road from Takalane to Ban-Mouang by way of Siempang and Kampo.

2. Road from Siempang to Cambodia via the ford of Pa-La-Su (Se-Sane).

3. Road from Stung-Treng to Kratie by way of Sreki.

4. Road from Stung-Treng to Ban-Done and Darlac, by way of Lompat or by way of Sreki.

The roads to Cambodia are the tracks followed by the convoys of oxen coming from the region of Nam-Nao, Song-Khone and Wapy.

Province of Attopeu. Road from Attopeu to Qui-Nhon by way of Kon-Toum and Ang-ke (1) (about 15 days on horseback or

(1) By now (1898-1899) there is a very good road for travelers on foot and horseback, which connects the Annamitic divide with the Mekong. At several points the road is built with ditches and is suitable for carts. The parts which are still somewhat difficult--

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the steep slopes of certain peaks, the brinks of torrents, etc.--are being subjected to new routings or improvement projects which will soon be carried out. (Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, loc. cit.) [Translator's note. This seems to be a reference to the December 1899 number, "Notes du Commandant supérieur du Bas Laos sur la région est du Bas Laos."]

elephant back).

Province of Saravane. 1. Road from Ban-Mouang to Saravane by way of Kham-Thong-Niai, along the Sedone (4 to 5 days). This road is a first category road over a distance of five kilometers from Keng-Kok to Keng-Pho. The falls of the Sedone can thus be avoided by a cart road at all seasons of the year. Over the rest of its route the road belongs to the second category.

2. Road from Saravane to Attopeu by way of Thateng, the plateau of the Bolovens, Nong-Bok and the Se-Pien (4 to 5 days. Second category).

3. Road from Saravane to Ai-Lao by way of Muong-Nong (a poor path).

Province of Darlac. 1. Road from Ban-Me-Thuot or Darlac to Ninh-Hoa (Annam). A six or seven day trip. This is a cart track on the Laotian side of the divide, that is to say as far as Ai-Bloum. At Me-Sao a branch forks toward Cong-Son (Annam). This is a portion of the route selected for the Saigon-Qui-Nhon railway.

[478] 2. Cart road from Ban-Done to Kratie, either by way of the Pou-Kha (10 to 12 days), or by going around the mountain to the north and connecting with the road from Stung-Treng to Kratie at Sreki.

2. PROJECTED LAND ROUTES OF COMMUNICATION

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Three large highways are projected, namely:

1. From Savannakhet to Ai-Lao and Hué; [Illustration here]
2. From Pak-Hin-Boun to Vinh by way of Ha-Trai;
3. From Luang-Prabang to Vien-Tiane.

These roads will be negotiable by carts and will be provided with iron and wooden bridges. Engineering officers have been placed at the disposition of the Superior Resident of Laos to make a study of these various routes.